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### **Much Ado About Nothing? Mainstream Research, Malaysian Media and Moral Panics\***

*You cannot learn through common sense how things are; you can only discover where they fit into the existing scheme of things.*

(Hall, S. et al , 1978)

*It is simply not possible to think about theories as if there were no value implications to the positions we take up. The most we can do in order to be scientific is to make our positions, our assumptions, and our values available to other people so that they know where our epistemological and political foundations are, so that they understand what it is that is founding the argument.*

(Hall, S., 1989)

#### **Malaysian Media and Youth - The Labelling Process**

For almost a decade now - certainly right up until the economic and political crises of 1997-1999 - it has been virtually the primary aim of the Malaysian Government to push the country towards attaining "developed country" status by the year 2020. In 1991, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, unveiled his "Vision 2020", proposing nine challenges<sup>1</sup> that the nation as a whole needs to face in order to become a developed country. It is also continuously stressed by the country's political leaders - principally again Mahathir - that the "developed" state the country should aspire towards is not one that simply and erroneously is a copy of present developed countries, particularly those of the West. Frequently blaming the West

for much of today's ills and often caricaturising Western countries as being decadent and devoid of spiritual and moral values, these Malaysian leaders instead argue for a process of development for Malaysia which places these values at the very core of development. This argument is perhaps best summed up in the fourth of the nine challenges, viz., "establishing a fully moral and ethical society...strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards".<sup>2</sup>

However, Malaysian society - like virtually all other societies - is not monolithic in nature. Aware of the diversity - ethnic, cultural, social and economic - of Malaysian society and the need to create a consensus in spite of this diversity in order to legitimise its ideology of development, the Malaysian government has had to address various "new" social phenomena at particular junctures in the 1990s which seemingly threaten its hegemony.

Between mid-1993 and mid-1995, two phenomena classified as "serious social problems" among Malaysian youth were highlighted in the mainstream newspapers and television in Malaysia. These "problems" were *budaya lepak* (loafing culture) and *bohsia* (a term used to describe young, supposedly promiscuous, girls deemed to be easy pick-ups).

The *lepak* phenomenon was first highlighted in a segment of a pilot magazine programme for youth, RSB, produced by TV3, a private television station. Following that, reports of *lepak* as a social problem snowballed in the press. The press published views, mainly official, of the problem, opinions from readers, and even provided "solutions" to the problem. One fear articulated in the press was that this youth culture, relatively unshaped and unsupervised by adults, would result in dire consequences for Malaysian society as a whole. Bleak images of the *lepak* phenomenon were conjured by the national press through, for example, headlines such as "Police: more students are involved in crime" (*New Straits Times*, 19/8/93), "Immoral side of *lepak* culture" (*New Straits Times*, 27/4/94), "Call to arrest decline in moral values" (*New Straits Times*, 18/7/94), "Nine Teens held for stealing from religious school" (*Star*, 30/6/94), "Loafing youths turn to illegal racing" (*Star*, 8/8/94). The press also carried headlines such as "Loafing result of parents, teachers neglecting duty" (*New Straits Times*, 4/7/94) and "Give teachers a free rein to

instil discipline" (Star, 28/6/94).

The *bohsia* phenomenon began to be highlighted much later than the *lepak* phenomenon. It is instructive to note that *bohsia* as a "problem" gained momentum when the press reported police investigations into allegations of an affair between a Chief Minister (in the ruling coalition) and a fifteen year old girl (Star, 30/8/94).<sup>3</sup> Soon after, reports, opinions and editorials highlighted the problem of "easy" pick-up girls. Headlines carried in the press included "When *bohsia* means trouble" (Star, 15/9/94), "Religious seminars to check moral decay" (Star, 1/10/94), "*Bohsia* woes: Ministry calls for curfew" (New Straits Times, 8/10/94), "Mums fear for *bohsia* daughters" (Star, 15/9/94) and "Need for parents to get their priorities right" (Star, 6/10/94).

One Malay daily newspaper (*Utusan Malaysia*, 8/10/94) went a step further. It interviewed a sixteen year old girl and reported her opinion that every girl must take care of herself for the very simple reason that she will eventually be someone's wife and mother. For her, and evidently for the newspaper, a girl's main objective was to become someone's wife, and getting involved in promiscuous activities would jeopardise her ability to achieve that goal. *Bohsia* girls, the wise sixteen year old asserted in the interview, are "bad" girls who hang around public areas seducing men.

In short, what the mainstream press on the whole was doing during this period was to provide images of both the *lepak* and the *bohsia* phenomena within a particular and narrow perspective. The discourse was judgmental in nature and no space was given for an analysis of the phenomena. Generally, the root of the problem, according to the press, was that youths needed supervision over their leisure hours, and, if need be, coercive measures should be taken to suppress their subcultures. Appropriately, according to this view, the spare time of these young people needed to be controlled, primarily through the provision of officially sanctioned forms of leisure activities.

It is instructive to note that the labelling of the *lepak* phenomenon differed somewhat from that of *bohsia*. From the analysis of headlines, the policing of sexuality in the case of *bohsia*, to borrow Nava's (1992:81) terminology, was through "branding gender unorthodoxy as unfeminine and undesirable". It was quite clear from our study of the press



reports that for both phenomena it was unclear how serious the problems really were. No concrete study or evidence was provided to prove the extent of the "problems", if indeed they were problems.

Following the initial reports on the "*lepak* problem", a nation-wide study was carried out to purportedly "solve the *lepak* problem among youth in a systematic manner" (Samsudin, 1994:viii).<sup>4</sup> The outcome of the study was widely reported in the press. The study "showed" that youth spent more than 16 hours a week loitering in shopping malls, that youths "with low self-esteem" spent an average of 26.3 hours per week loafing, and that 58 percent of loiterers came from families earning RM700 or less per month. The study did not - indeed could not - prove that the "*lepak*" per se yielded vice but strongly implied that the potential for "deviant" behaviour, like drug addiction, premarital sex, alcoholism and crime, existed because youth who "*lepak*" often mixed with others involved in such activities (*Star*, 16/6/94). Not surprisingly perhaps, the study did not even bother to define what constituted "*lepak*".

Soon after, the then Malaysian Youth and Sports Minister, Abdul Ghani Othman, announced that a comprehensive nationwide plan for youths would be launched by the Prime Minister as part of the government's efforts to tackle the "*lepak* problem", and that the plan was a response to the findings of the abovementioned survey (*New Straits Times*, 2/5/94). Not long after, the authorities unveiled a strategy incorporating two programmes and a movement to overcome the "*lepak* problem". The programmes were Charisma (*Karisma*), which is aimed at improving the lifestyle of youths, and Friends of Sports (*Rakan Sukan*), to help youth make better use of their time by engaging in sports activities. The movement dreamt up by the Ministry was called the Youth Brigade (*Briged Muda*), where members would be in uniform and given military type training (*New Straits Times*, 22/6/94), remarkably similar to National Service, albeit on a voluntary basis. It was assumed that such programmes and the movement would provide "wholesome" recreational activities to those who would otherwise engage in unsanctioned, evidently immoral, pleasures.

We would argue that underlying the provision of these programmes for Malaysian youths was an attempt to contain

youth subcultures and so-called delinquent behaviour. In this respect we agree with Nava (1992:74) that such kinds of provision are "part of a much wider attempt to create moral and social cohesion, to win consent". As Brian Simon (in Nava, 1992:75) pertinently puts it, the aim of youth provision is really to 'preserve the established order ... in the State by educating the masses in manners and morals and political responsibility, (which means), of course, acquiescence".

It is not surprising, therefore, to note that following the provision of youth programmes, other agencies of control also drew up battle plans to fight the "enemy"; an "enemy" seemingly threatening the nation's youth and, more ominously, the moral fabric of Malaysian society. The Malaysian Information Ministry, for one, started providing new guidelines - guidelines which remain as vague as those that came before - to censor media products which, it is assumed, will destroy the moral values of Malaysian society, a society deemed to be easily manipulated and influenced. Subsequently, for a society seemingly obsessed with labels and slogans, the Information Ministry provided guidelines pertaining to the censorship of materials containing elements of VHSC (Violence, Horror, Sex, and Counterculture).

What we find most disturbing is that, purely based on such assertions initially made in the media, later legitimised by political groups and supported by some mainstream academics, control measures were introduced to "cure" the so-called problems of *lepak* and *bohsia*. There certainly was no investigation into the nature of these "problems" or for whom they were constituted as problems. Instead what transpired was that the state all too easily increased its control over Malaysian society at large and, more specifically, on the Malaysian media industry.

Hence, to use the *lepak* phenomenon as an example, what we had was a situation where the activity of *lepak* was initially labelled as deviant. When the media and other agencies such as the police and religious organisations came into the picture, what Young (1981) has termed the "deviancy amplification spiral" was set in motion. Youths engaged in the activities of *lepak* and *bohsia* were then stereotyped primarily because the agenda and the range of discourses available had already been set. According to Golding (1982:59-60), there are three phases to the amplification process, and, in the case of the two phenomena, the three stages were as follows:-

- a. The *lepak* and *bohsia* phenomena were labelled as social problems. The phenomena were reported in the media and, as a result, insignificant phenomena were amplified (through press reports).
- b. There was a period when the phenomena were linked to other previous phenomena. The phenomena were then linked to other (deviant) phenomena, such as promiscuity, smoking, and illicit drug use (that is phenomena which raise issues of morality, discipline, education, and health).
- c. At the third level, institutions such as the government, law and religion entered the scene. This increased interest in the phenomena, which, in turn, became of public interest and assumed to be social problems. Suggestions were then provided by various bodies to solve the problems and such suggestions became news items in the media. From here on, the phenomena became "new" problems that were put on the political agenda. The "reality" of the problems was then strengthened by "academic" studies. In the *lepak* case, the academic study legitimised, without questioning, the official definition of the problem. In the final analysis, the deviant label became a legitimate label.

It is evident from these developments between mid-1993 to mid-1995 that the *lepak* and *bohsia* phenomena had become central issues for discussion and debate in various segments of Malaysian society. It might be pertinent to ask at this juncture why, indeed, Malaysian youth groups and activities had become the focus of attention.<sup>5</sup>

If we look at Table 1, and consider certain statements made by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the answer is quite obvious. According to a document entitled *Karisma, Briged Muda dan Rakan Sukan* (1994:1-4) prepared by the Ministry of Youth and Sports,

*The generation of youth constitutes the largest proportion of the country's population whereby in 1990, 42.39% or 7.6 million of the population are between the ages of 15-39....  
The youth population is indeed our treasure and hope in achieving the national vision of 2020. Based on the population*



projection for the year 2000, it can be assumed that 41.24% of the population in the year 2020 will be in the category of what we call youth...

It is of utmost importance that attention be given to this group as they are the treasure and hope of the country, who will eventually lead the country; they are a potential source of labour in the industrial, commercial and economic sectors.

Age Group/ Year	1980*	1985*	1990*	1995*	2000*
15-19	1.58 (11.38)	1.72 (10.89)	1.84 (10.3)	1.96 (9.77)	2.22 (9.9)
20-24	1.36 (9.80)	1.57 (9.94)	1.71 (9.57)	1.83 (9.12)	1.95 (8.69)
25-29	0.12 (0.86)	1.35 (8.55)	1.57 (8.70)	1.71 (8.52)	1.83 (8.16)
30-34	0.9 (6.48)	1.11 (7.03)	1.34 (7.5)	1.56 (7.77)	1.55 (6.91)
35-39	0.73 (5.26)	0.89 (5.64)	1.11 (6.22)	1.33 (6.63)	1.7 (7.58)
Total	4.69 (33.79)	6.64 (42.05)	7.57 (42.39)	8.39 (41.8)	9.25 (41.24)

TABLE 1  
Malaysia:  
Size of  
Youth  
Population

\*figures ( in millions)

Source: *Karisma, Briged Muda Dan Rakan Sukan* (1994:1)

It is clear from these statements that those in authority have plans to improve the lifestyle of Malaysian youth. This certainly augurs well for Malaysian youth. However, our concern in this paper is with the fact that in designing and planning the path of development for "Malaysian youths", consultation with the various groups under this umbrella has hardly been undertaken. They - like those engaging in activities such as *lepak* and *bohsia* - are simply assumed to be in need of guidance and their views deemed unimportant. Indeed, following Nava (1992:76), in the Malaysian context, it would appear that youth provision remains "predicated on a welfarist cultural-deficit model which conceptualises certain sectors of youth as in need of supervision, protection and 'life skills', which, in short, tends to hang on to the notion of certain sectors of youth as a problem". As we indicate in the following sections, hanging on to such a notion not only lays bare our blind acceptance of certain (mainstream) ideologie, but also betrays our tendency to ignore developments in the study of youth subcultures. More importantly, it prevents us from making any genuine attempt to understand subcultural groupings and the ways in which they may be trying to make sense of their situation.

### Youth, Social Problems, Deviance and Moral Panics

Over the ages and in many societies, the young or youths<sup>5</sup> have continued to be perceived as a cause for concern. Very often it is assumed, although rarely proven, that the young are those most easily influenced (see Comstock and Rubenstein, 1971; Himmelweit et al, 1958; Schramm et al 1961; and Winn, 1985 as general examples, and Consumer's Association of Penang, 1984, for a Malaysian example). In other instances, assertions have been made that youths create social problems and are themselves potentially deviant (see Cohen, 1982 and Young, 1982). This section discusses the background and development of two basic assumptions - youth as a group that is weak and easily influenced, and youth as deviant.

There are different areas of studies which have focused specifically on this group. Over the past twenty years or so, it is evident that two areas - the sociology of childhood and the sociology of youth cultures - have contributed immensely towards greater understanding of youth groups.

However, in the context of Malaysia, developments in research and analysis in these two fields are still being marginalised by many academics, including those who specialise in the field of media and communication. Indeed, the perspective taken in trying to understand the relationship between the media and the socialisation of children, at least in Malaysia, is still strongly influenced by a neo-behaviourist tradition in psychology, and functionalist sociology. Our basic argument in this regard is that this situation has come about - and is perpetuated - primarily because it is linked to the wider elements of societal control and power.

For Richards (1974:4), the neo-behaviourist tradition views the process of socialisation as a process of psychological learning and training of an individual, particularly for children who are deemed to be like "putty" in need of moulding and training by outside factors. In other words, children are assumed to be immature, irrational, incompetent and uncultured, as compared to adults who are considered mature, rational, efficient and cultured. Socialisation is then a process which can change children magically into adults who will then inherit all those "adult" qualities mentioned above. According to Richards (1974:6) again, it is asserted from the tradition of functionalism that the process of socialisation will



change the raw materials (people) to become functional and useful members of a society.

What is clearly inherent in this approach is that it legitimates a strong need in adults to preserve the established order, and implicit in this assumption is that this established order is one that has the consent of the people. Children are then seen as agents to perpetuate this established order which has the consensus of "the people". The process of socialisation trains and prepares them for this role. In other words, children as a social category are nothing more than passive representatives of the future generation, i.e., adults.

In summarising this orthodox view of children, Shildkrout (1978: 109 - 110) points out that the acculturation of children is seen as a step in the socialisation process prior to entering adulthood, and if conformity follows, then socialisation is successful. However, if this group turns out to be deviant, then socialisation has failed.

Clearly, this view, despite the valid criticisms levelled at it, is still very dominant, particularly in the conceptual framework of those who are in power and want to perpetuate that status quo. This does not imply in any way that those who hold on to such a view are not concerned about the welfare of children. However, we would argue that the pretext of protecting children and being concerned about their welfare can lead to exploitation and authoritarian control. This of course arises from the view that "we" (adults) know more about "them" (children) and "their" welfare and needs. In this context, "their" welfare and needs, are invariably defined by adults and not by "them". Such an assumption renders children powerless to interact with the elements in society, including the media, and, accordingly, it is argued that this powerlessness renders children to be easily influenced by these elements (See Winn, 1985 ).

That is why, according to the orthodox view, it is so important for the socialisation process to succeed, failing which society will inevitably produce deviants. Again, it must be emphasised that the whole notion of deviance, like other social phenomena, is a social construct. Specifically, one must be aware that deviance is not an intrinsic quality of specific social acts, but a consequence of social definition made by people or groups in society who have the power to ensure that their definitions carry most weight and legitimacy. Very often,

deviant acts are seen as immoral, sinful acts and behaviour. Therefore, if a person, or a group, is labelled deviant, it would then include a whole gamut of other labels such as violent, irresponsible and immoral.

When a person or group is labelled as deviant by those who are in power, such as politicians, religious leaders, mass media and academics, society, according to Cohen (1982 : 11) will respond in four ways. First, society can ignore the deviance; second, it can see it as something that is constructive; third, it can suggest the enforcement of stricter laws to police the crisis; and fourth, it can offer some kind of rehabilitation to the deviants.

Very often, deviant phenomena give rise to moral panics, whereby societal values and morals appear to be threatened. Cohen (1972:28) describes moral panics as a process whereby "a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests".

The concept of moral panics has been used by researchers to explain the rise of certain phenomena and subsequent actions taken by those in power. Apart from Cohen's seminal subcultural study on British Mods and Rockers (1981), Golding and Middleton (1982) applied this concept in their analysis of poverty and its representation in the British media, and Young (1981) used this concept in his participant observation study on the use of drugs in London, and the representation of this issue in the British media.

Although this concept has not been used by researchers within the Malaysian context, we wish to emphasise that this is a crucial concept that can be used in understanding how the actions of youth have been interpreted in the media. However, to understand the value of this concept, researchers would need to focus not on phenomena such as *lepak* or *bohsia* from the perspective of status quo ideology, or from a common sense perspective, but work from the perspective of trying to sincerely understand the reasons for the occurrence of such phenomena. Hence, if the alternative perspective is to be taken, the following factors would have to be considered:-

1. That deviance is a social construct - based on the structures and existing hierarchy of power.
2. All researchers must not merely accept, but must question the labels provided, primarily by those in

- power.
3. Researchers must also be aware that there is a possibility that deviance could be a consequence of society preparing various objectives to be achieved by certain groups, but does not provide the opportunities to enable them to achieve those objectives.

In other words, what is needed is a perspective which widens its focus of research by looking at the interaction and power relations between what Box (1981) has called 'rule breakers', 'rule makers' and 'rule enforcers'. Related to this, Cohen (1982:17) has rightly emphasised that :-

*The concept of crime is meaningful only in terms of certain acts being prohibited by the state, and a problem can only be a problem to somebody. So whenever we see terms such as deviance and social problem, we must ask: "Says Who?"*

### Media and Socialisation

Related to the question of deviance is the fact that for a very long time there has been great concern and belief that the media (and popular culture generally) have great powers to manipulate and influence society, the young in particular. It is evident that this was the manifest concern of the Malaysian policy makers when preparing the guidelines regarding VHSC. It is also evident that this concern was articulated long before empirical studies were carried out to "prove" the influence and effects of the media. As far back as in 19th century America, Anthony Comstock had asserted that the print media had negative effects on the young (McCron 1976:17). Murdock and McCron (1979) have also shown that in Britain there was concern that roadshows and street theatres had negative effects, particularly on the young working class in the 19th century.

Based on these fears and worries, it is not surprising that the area of research into the effects of the media became popular, particularly among early psychology researchers in America. This preoccupation with effects has crystallised into what is now often called the 'effects tradition' (O'Sullivan et al., 1983: 80-81). It is not surprising that there has been a proliferation of academic research on effects of media on



voting, crime, aggression, racial and other attitudes to meet the needs of the media industry. However, it is also clear that in many cases this has reduced complex issues and relations of the media and audience to simplistic notions of media and its effects on the audience. Many of the studies indeed focus on violence in the media (television, video and film) and its effects on children.

Based on their narrow conceptual framework, researchers in this tradition attempted to improve on their research methodologies and techniques, producing even more social psychological models to separate out the specific effects of media from other possible personal or social factors. However, one fundamental flaw in this kind of research is that it fails to evaluate its basic assumptions and the theories of society which have influenced such assumptions. Research within the effects tradition almost always focuses on the dominant effect. Secondary effects or the possibility of other effects are ignored. Emphasis is also given to negative effects, and that is that the media encourage 'antisocial' behaviour. However, if media products are works of art or are considered as high culture, this negative influence would then magically disappear (see McCron, 1976).

The objective of this paper is not to list the weakness of this tradition, simply because much has been written by other researchers<sup>6</sup>. However, within the context of this discussion, the concept of children has to be given due consideration because many assertions made and the studies carried out thus far in Malaysia are within the effects tradition and <sup>5</sup>have focused on children and the misunderstanding that children constitute a category undivided by differences of, for example, sex, race, and class. Yet, we would argue, these are issues that cannot be taken for granted because they can be mediating factors in the process of studying the interaction between children and the media. The assumption that children are a "monolithic" and "homogenous" group is a rather narrow assumption taken from the neo-behaviourist tradition.

It is strange that such studies are still being conducted in Malaysia with no notion of the important contribution of, among others, French historian, Phillip Aries, on the concept of childhood, at least in the context of European history. In his influential book, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), Aries points out that there was no concept of childhood during medieval

times. According to him, (1962:50), before the 17th century children were depicted either as young males or females in paintings. In the seventeenth century, children ceased to be dressed like adults and outfits reserved for their age distinguished them from the adults. Indeed, differences in clothes worn by children and adults before the 17th century merely distinguished social status and not childhood from adulthood. Franklin (1986: 7-12) claims that the idea and concept of childhood appeared during the change from the feudal system to the capitalist system which created a new class, the bourgeoisie. The capitalist system in Europe accelerated the process of urbanisation and industrialisation, which, in turn, increased the division of labour. Rampant developments in science and technology at that time had created a demand for skilled labour. As a result, schools were set up and middle class boys were the first group to go through training in schools. According to Franklin (1986:12), thus was created the first group of children. However, both views from Aries and Franklin are still being debated. Nevertheless, what is important from their conclusions is that the concept of childhood is a social construct which changes according to historical developments, and differs according to cultures (see James and Prout, 1990).

Therefore, we would contend that in the Malaysian context, to analyse the link between media and children, or youth groups, in a more meaningful manner, we would need to initially understand that the link is a complex one and not one that exists in a vacuum.

### **Towards a deeper understanding of subcultures**

One major problem that many countries, including Malaysia, face, is the problem of coexistence among multi-cultural groups. As we have outlined at the outset, Malaysian society is currently being urged by its political leaders to meet the challenges outlined in Mahathir's Vision 2020. In this regard, we would argue that if, as a nation, we genuinely wish to face up to at least four of the challenges - that is to form a united country, a democratic society, a mature and liberal society and a caring society - then it is necessary to begin to understand, in a deeper way, lifestyles that differ from ours. We would contend that this deeper understanding will not come about if

we assume that "our" lifestyle is better than "theirs". In other words, in the context of understanding local subcultures, like youth cultures, it would be more meaningful if studies carried out by Malaysian academics are premised on the sincere need to know and understand that particular subculture, rather than based on the need to label such groups as deviant, according to certain "given" definitions.

On the basis of Brake's (1985:19-21) suggestions, we believe that any genuine analysis of Malaysian subcultures would need to consider:-

1. *The nature of the subculture.* This would include analysis of the historical development of the subculture and its relationship to the structural problems of the wider socio-economic structure. The style and perspective of the subculture would also need to be analysed to understand how far and what are the possible factors within it which can help its members to solve problems.
2. *Societal reaction to the subculture.* An analysis would also need to be made of the media's mediation of the nature of the subculture. The immediate effects of this in terms of significant others is necessary, as well as wider societal reaction from, say, moral entrepreneurs and public and official guardians of moral order.
3. *The construction of a natural history of the moral career of the subcultural member.* At this level, if it is assumed that the behaviour of the members in the group reflect a need to solve problems at individual and group levels, then, among other things, the researcher would need to tease out the variables such as the reasons and ways individuals participate in the subculture, the nature of involvement and their commitment to the subculture.
4. *The social organisation of the subculture.* This would involve analysis at two levels - the subculture's relation to the wider social structure, and the effects this may have on social interaction within the subculture.
5. *The persistence or discontinuance of the subculture.* The subculture is unlikely to remain unaltered, and the



altering boundaries of the subculture as well as its changing form would need to be assessed.

Any analysis that takes into consideration these factors raises several questions and problems regarding methodology. However, the historical development of studies on subcultures shows that these problems are not insurmountable. Certainly, in the context of Malaysia, these problems need to be addressed if we sincerely wish to identify and understand the problems of our youth subcultures; more so at a time when the country is undergoing many changes - political, social, economic and cultural.

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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These challenges (Mahathir, 1991:2-4) may be summarised as follows:

1. "establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny...at peace with itself...(and)...made up of one 'Bangsa Malaysia'".
2. "creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society with faith and confidence in itself...psychologically subservient to none and respected by the peoples of other nations".
3. "fostering and developing a mature democratic society, practising a form of mature, consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy that can be a model for many developing countries".
4. "establishing a fully moral and ethical society...strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest of ethical standards".
5. "establishing a mature, liberal and tolerant Malaysian society".
6. "establishing a scientific and progressive society...innovative and forward- looking".
7. "establishing a fully caring society and a caring culture, a social system in which society will come before self".
8. "ensuring an economically just society...in which there is fair and

equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation".

9. "establishing a prosperous society, with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient".

<sup>2</sup> Any impartial observer of Malaysia, of course, would be forgiven for thinking that this is a sick joke, given developments over the past year or so, particularly with regard to the Malaysian police and the judiciary.

<sup>3</sup> The Chief Minister - who resigned his position - was cleared of wrongdoing, and the girl was sent to a "moral rehabilitation" centre and has not been heard of since.

<sup>4</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive critique of the study which was undeniably weak in its conceptual framework, definitions, theory and methodology. The overall weakness of the study is indeed unfortunate, as it was the first large scale nationwide study of this nature conducted by Malaysian academics. It is however not difficult to understand that the weaknesses in the study - although not forgivable - can be attributed to two major factors. First, it was funded by the Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sports which wanted to legitimise its stand and strategy on Malaysian youth in a period when the country was heading towards a general election. Second, all the researchers clearly lacked a cultural studies background and were unable to analyse and interpret subcultural phenomena, particularly youth subcultures.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, "youth" refers generally to those below the age of 30. This however, is only a working definition. At several points in this paper, several other definitions are introduced to indicate that the term is represented by several subcultural groupings and in no way reflects a homogenous group.

<sup>6</sup> McCron (1976) has provided a thorough and critical evaluation of the effects tradition. Hall (1982) and Morley (1992) have also provided convincing critiques of the tradition and its theoretical weaknesses.

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